

WomenWord



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Women in Ministry

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

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A New Landscape of Leadership

Thirty years ago, there were no women serving as Executive Ministers. That changed on September 1, 1985 when the Rev. Kathryn Baker became the first woman called to serve the American Baptist Churches of Niagara Frontier, one of 87 candidates who were considered!

It took four years before a second woman was called to an executive minister position. In those early years, women began to slowly emerge in executive leadership positions. After fifteen years, only five women had been called to serve as Executive Minister. In recent years the landscape of leadership has begun to dramatically change. In 2014 two women were called to executive minister positions: Rev. Yvonne Carter and Rev. Marie Onwubuariri. This year has already seen the calling of the Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley. Altogether fourteen women have now been called into executive minister leadership, each the first woman Executive Minister to serve their region. Today, seven of those are currently serving. A new landscape of leadership is emerging!

As this new leadership has emerged women have brought a different dimension to leadership even as they have lived out their unique gifts and calling. This new leadership gives us a new way of imaging leadership and imagining what it means to be a leader. This new way is creative, collaborative, and highly connective.

When Kathryn Baker first accepted the call to serve as Executive Minister, she was not trying to break ground or make a statement. She was simply striving to be faithful to her God-given call and use her God-given gifts in ministry.

The Executive Ministers who have contributed to this issue are all living out their call and sharing their gifts in ministry. My hope is that we will all be inspired to live out our call and share our gifts in ever expanding and ever new ways, and that some of us might even see ourselves as the next Executive Minister of some region!



Join me in journeying into this new landscape of leadership and celebrating a future in which all God's gifts given to all God's people are able to be fully utilized and fully lived out for the good of all and the glory of God!

Your Partner in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Patricia P. Hernandez, National Director

Kathryn Baker -
Niagara Frontier 1985 - 1993

Yamina Apolinaris -
Puerto Rico 1989 - 2000

Linda Spoolstra -
Massachusetts 1990 - 2003

Louise B. Barger -
Rocky Mountains 1993 - 2004

Mildred Myren -
Metro Chicago 1993 - 2000

Susan Gillies -
Nebraska 2000 - 2010

Marcia Patton - *Evergreen 2004 -*

Judy Allbee - *Connecticut 2005 -*

Liliana Da Valle -
Rhode Island 2007 - 2011

Joan Friesen - *Indianapolis 2009 -*

Soozi Whitten Ford -
Indiana/Kentucky 2012 -

Yvonne Carter -
Cleveland Baptist Association 2014 -

Marie Onwubuariri -
Wisconsin 2014 -

Cheryl Dudley -
Metro New York 2015 -



Rev. Dr. Judy G. Allbee

Rev. Dr. Judy G. Allbee, Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, has served in this position since 2005. Judy is the first woman called to be an Executive Minister in Connecticut. Prior to this she served as the first woman called to be an Area Resource Minister with the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, and previously to that

she was an Area Minister and pastor in Connecticut.

*He was looking at
the big picture, and
I was looking at
what I was facing
every week*

Over my many years in ministry, I have discovered two important aspects of leadership. There are many more, often determined by the culture and the context, but I think these two concepts are true regardless of where we serve.

In 1992 I was called to serve as an Area Resource Minister for ABC of Indiana/Kentucky under the leadership of Dr. Eugene Ton. I was the first woman to serve as Area Minister in that region and for many years I worked with only male colleagues.

It was a huge cultural shift for this New England Baptist to go to the Midwest. Church life was very different, even the hymns were different. Meetings were conducted differently and the potluck suppers were a far cry from what I had experienced all my life. On the theological spectrum there was not a wide spread of diversity nor was there much cultural diversity. And the land is flat. All of this took some getting used to but I loved the ministry there. I knew I was different – obviously working with these eight men made that ever so clear. I realized that I thought differently and my leadership style was different, although at the time I could not identify how it was so.

Dr. Ton was the reason I was in Indiana because he was ahead of the equality curve. He had encouraged the search committee to find the best person for the position regardless of gender. One day I said to him that if I were in his position, I would be concerned that one of my Area Ministers would not be welcomed or even sometimes allowed into 10% of the churches for which she is responsible because of her gender. It did not bother him because he was looking at the big

picture, and I was looking at what I was facing every week. That day Dr. Ton handed me a book, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership* by Sally Helgesen. It looked at women executives in the secular world and how differently they acted in their jobs from their male counterparts – not better or worse, just different. It was my “aha book.”

I found myself in that book and that opened the door for me. The author wrote about leadership in terms of spider webs rather than in terms of hierarchy. The book described a kind of leadership that is very participatory, affirming, action oriented and welcoming. All this was what I was and still try to be all about. It is not about retaining or grabbing power; it is not about top down leadership, rather it is about sharing resources to do the work/ministry to which we have been called.

The second thing I learned about my own style of leadership was the importance of relationships. During this same period of time, there were a lot of church growth books being written using the model of the pastor as CEO. Some pastors at the time try to use that model and they came into great discord as they neglected the relational aspect of their ministry.

I believe that leadership is all about building relationships. Building up the body of Christ, whether as pastor or judicatory leader, requires relationship building. It is the foundation of all that we are with Jesus Christ and all that we do in our calling.

These two learnings have stayed with me throughout my thirty plus years of ministry. Recently at our ABC-CONN Board meeting there was a discussion about the diversity that exists in our region. One of the key components to being able to celebrate our diversity is the time spent in building relationships with pastors and churches. Relationship building and a spider web style of leadership are two keys to my ministry.



Rev. Dr. Marcia J. Patton

Rev. Marcia J. Patton, Executive Minister of Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches since June, 2004.

However, it began long before as Marcia served on the ABC/ Northwest staff and was assigned to work on the Task Force to create a new region. Previous to receiving the call as Executive Minister, Marcia served as the Transitional Executive Minister.

Evergreen Association is unique in American Baptist Regions for at least two reasons. One is that we are organized by ethnic caucuses and the other is that we do our work by consensus.

When we adopted the by-laws on February 22, 2003 there was a lot of discomfort with the notion of doing work by consensus. On the other hand there had been a lot of discomfort with the first draft of the by-laws which read "Manner of Acting: in all matters the majority will rule unless otherwise noted in these by-laws." As we were doing preparatory work on the by-laws 30 people gathered to read through them. There was a pregnant silence after reading the original text. It was almost as if you could hear the wheels turning in people's minds. The majority rule was one of the tensions that brought us to creating a new region, was that what we wanted? If not majority rule, then what did we want?

So began a cautious exploration into what consensus might mean for us. We put in the "3/4 vote clause" just in case the experiment did not work and approved the by-laws by consensus!

We are still learning a lot about how to develop consensus, but we have some insights to offer. First, I think it is important to affirm why you are doing consensus in the first place, so that if you decide to set aside consensus you also know why. In Evergreen, the value we have is that the people in the room are more important than the decision. So hearing from and having everyone in the room agree to the work that

is being done is central. Indeed the work of including everyone is more important than the decision itself.

A second thing to realize about consensus decision making is that the leader/moderator is more powerful and has more responsibilities than the leader using Robert's Rules of Order. This is true simply because there is no "rule of order" to follow in consensus. The leader must be able to competently "read the room" and "assess how the information is being received." There is a dance that is needed with consensus. A leader needs to know how much time to give a situation. It is too easy to fall into "Does anyone disagree?" A mode which really does not easily allow a dissenter to speak out. There is a dance that is needed, to know when to call for a straw poll, how many are in full agreement, how many can live with the agreement, how many have questions that must be answered before they can agree? In Evergreen we encourage the use of Mutual Invitation to help everyone have voice.¹

The third thing I will offer about consensus is the need to divide into smaller groups once the size of the body gets beyond 12 to seriously consider a subject and get out various views and concerns on an issue. Trying to do the detail work in a large group is difficult, but individuals can be heard in a small group. Evergreen begins the work of consensus building in our caucus groups, generally safer groups for many people than the large group. In concensus, you do not get where you want to go by a direct route, but you get there together.

¹ Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 1993), p. 82.

*The people
in the room
are more
important
than
the decision*

*Financial planning
is about more than
budgeting and
planning for
retirement.
It also includes
protecting one's
family...*



Rev. Dr. Patricia
L. Hunter, CFP®

It is second nature for me to be a leader wherever I feel great passion and I am passionate about helping God's servants put their financial houses in order. In the 28 years that I have worked for MMBB Financial Services, this has been my ministry. After seminary I served for seven years as an Assistant Pastor in Seattle.

Then, I joined the MMBB staff as one of the Directors of Women in Ministry for the ABC. My ministry soon evolved at MMBB into working with our members in the area of retirement planning and benefits.

It is important to me that ministers and lay church workers have the tools they need to effectively plan for retirement. Those with a heart for ministry may not have a head for investing, budgeting, and financial planning. Too frequently, those who have given their lives serving God's people and proclaiming the gospel, have little to live on in retirement. At MMBB, we want every pastor and church worker to retire with dignity, which includes having enough money.

Education, self-confidence, and having a pastor's heart, all help me lead with the assurance that I am called to this work. MMBB is a knowledge based organization and all staff are encouraged to pursue education that will help them serve our members. To that end, I earned my designation as a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™. There are eight CFP® professionals at MMBB. Most investment companies will provide financial planning at a cost of \$800-\$2,000, or charge a percentage of dollars under management. At MMBB, we provide financial planning at no cost to all our members.

I particularly want women in ministry to get on track and stay on track financially. For me that means helping them create financial wellness so they can

focus on the ministry to which God called them. Financial wellness includes:

- Spending less than what you earn,
- Having an emergency fund,
- Getting a W2 from the church or your primary place of employment,
- Paying Social Security on a self-employed basis,
- Investing for retirement, even though it may be decades away.

Planning for retirement is not difficult, but it takes discipline. By the time we are 40 years of age, we should be investing 15% of our income towards our retirement. Knowing that women are frequently paid less and live longer than men, makes it even more important for us to be disciplined in our savings. A cardinal rule of investing is, "Don't put off for tomorrow, what you can do today, because time is money."

Financial planning is more than budgeting and planning for retirement. It also includes protecting one's family in the event of disability and premature death. Comprehensive financial planning also looks at legacy and estate planning.

Knowing there are few clergywomen of color with my expertise motivates me to lead and share my knowledge. We know that sometimes women in ministry feel embarrassed or ashamed by their financial situation. We are here to serve you at MMBB and we have the tools to help you get on the path to financial wellness. We will talk with you and work with you to map out a plan that will help you reach your financial goals.

Rev. Dr. Patricia L. Hunter, CFP®
Senior Benefits Consultant



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Rev. Marie Onwubuariri

Rev. Marie Onwubuariri, Executive Minister of ABC of Wisconsin, began serving as the regional Executive Minister in August 2014. Marie is humbled to be the first woman, first person of color, first non-European immigrant, and the youngest Executive Minister of this region. Marie is also the first Asian-American female Executive Minister in ABC-USA.

In just a few months of living into a new ministry I have had many opportunities to consider both the expectations of others of an Executive Minister and my own understanding of the possibilities of this role. On most points so far there is close agreement, so the question for my reflections has not so much been “What?” but rather “How?” How can I facilitate a spirit of “synergy in mission” (the annual theme for the region chosen before I arrived)? How do I foster collaboration among our constituency across differences of context, approach, and priority? How do I tend to the demands of the role while also caring for family and self? How do I lead within an established institution as a person who outwardly does not fit the image of what has been the norm throughout its history?

The quest for answers to such questions is a daily and perpetual soul-searching endeavor, one that keeps me in need of constant reminder that I was called not because I was expected to do what and how it has always been done. Rather, the hope was that I would bring all that has shaped me and go forth, collaboratively, with the vision that the region and I perceive together.

It has been a blessing to be welcomed into a region that is familiar with taking bold steps, living with and affirming the diversity of peoples and giftedness, and believing and acting as if the gospel of Jesus Christ is still relevant. One of my greatest challenges will be to hold in tension these living values in one hand with an organism (embedded with systems and the resulting functionality) in the other hand—two realities that often create destructive dissonance rather than

awe-inspiring harmony. It is requiring a broad new landscape of leadership to bring life-giving transformation and release to this tension.

It has been close to a year since I was called, but I have been imagining myself in such a ministry role for over a decade. Such musing was not rooted in an ambition for leadership so much as it was a sincere desire to find and live into my call. Many times I asked in the safety of my familial conversations, “Who do I think I am?” Time and time again, the answer came back, in variations, “It’s not who you think you are; it’s who God made you to be.” I am here because many people spoke into my life things about myself that I could not recognize, or was reluctant to acknowledge, or would only tell myself in the secret of my solitude, lest I be thought of as high-on-myself. Girls and women must be encouraged to not just use their gifts but to live into them to their fullest potential. I recently preached from the book of Esther, and I told the congregation that we need more “Mordecai’s,” men who would encourage girls and women to consider that “perhaps you have come [to royal dignity] for just such a time as this,” even if it meant that they would then have to submit to the woman’s leadership.¹ Well, we need more men *and* women who are encouragers *and* women who are called by God to be leaders to faithfully and boldly live into their call, regardless of how others may interpret your intentions. My hope is that as I live into my call, I do not stray far from God’s continued purpose for life’s ministry, and in the moments of greatest temptation and weakness that I do not stray far from who God made me to be and continues to mold me to become. I pray this for all fellow pilgrims on the faithful journey of living into call.

¹ Scripture excerpt from Esther 4:14b New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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*“It’s not who you
think you are;
it’s who God made
you to be.”*

*The table to which
we come is
a round table,
where every seat is
at an equal
distance from the
center, with Christ
as the center and
focus of our
ministry.*



Rev. Yvonne B. Carter

Rev. Yvonne B. Carter, Executive Minister of the Cleveland Baptist Association has held that office since January, 2014. Yvonne is honored to be the first woman Executive Minister in the Cleveland Baptist Association, and the first African-American woman Executive in ABCUSA.

I came to ministry later in life than many, after serving many years in corporate and non-profit management. From earliest childhood I had sensed that God had a calling on my life, but I didn't know what it was. I understood that God had called me to Himself and invited me into His heart. However, it took me years to understand that God was also calling me to be His instrument through whom others would hear Him calling them. Though it has not been without a struggle, I now have no doubt that God has called me as His partner in Kingdom work, and has empowered me as a leader in Christian ministry.

My personal philosophy of leadership has a lot to do with discipleship—living out the call to follow Jesus. It's important for me to exemplify the humility, compassion and character of Jesus as I fulfill my leadership responsibilities. Part of that is recognizing that leadership is not a solo endeavor. We are not called to “go it alone.” I see it as my responsibility to invite others to the table, to hear other voices and embrace other perspectives. In my view, the table to which we come is a round table, where every seat is at an equal distance from the center, with Christ as the center and focus of our ministry.

As a Christian leader, I value community and strive to create a sense of community among those with whom I minister. I am persuaded that God put us together in Christian community to live out true *koinonia* and love. I Corinthians 12 reminds us that we all need one another; and I Corinthians 13 is the *magna carta* of Christian love.

As an ABC Regional Executive, I am committed to the “associational principle” – that we can do more together than any one of us can do alone, and I see it as my responsibility to develop and nurture the relationships that make it possible for us to be on mission as one community of faith.

Another value I hold as a leader is to empower others to realize their full potential. In every leadership role to which I have been called - as an associate minister in a local congregation; a denominational executive on ABC National staff; and now as an ABC Regional Executive Minister – I have attempted to nurture leadership growth in others by encouraging individuals to take the lead in up-front ministry while I work behind the scenes to provide support and encouragement.

The following five values represent the commitments I have made in order to maintain a fruitful and faithful ministry. I have made a commitment to:

*Personal Well-Being Healthy Family Life
Life-long Learning Gift-Based Ministry
Decentralized Leadership*

I don't claim to be all that God would have me to be; however, I am grateful for the opportunity to allow God to use me just as I am.



Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley

Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley, Executive Minister of ABC of Metro New York, began this role in May 2015. Cheryl is the newest Executive Director and joins the other woman Executives to create a new landscape of leadership.

When I was a child, some of my most profound spiritual teachers were women as well as men, and this continues to be true. My parents instilled in my sisters and me “that nothing was impossible,” but racism and sexism is real. We were also warned that our

hard work might not be enough because of inherent resistance and abject discrimination in the world. Despite this, we were encouraged and sometimes shown ways how to cross thresholds of resistance in order to be faithful to the vision God planted within. I came to realize that “they wouldn't let me” is not an acceptable excuse. I was accountable to God, so that accountability pushed me to look in unusual places, and in those unusual places, profound treasures were often found. To be told “you can't do that” has been a counter motivator to me to go ahead and prove that the barrier declared was a false one. One can grow easily tired when good, church folks resist and block the blessings, skills, and gifts of women and men, all created in the image of God, who simply want to express their faith in ministry.



Rev. Joan C. Friesen

Rev. Joan C. Friesen, Executive Minister of American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis, has served in this position since November 1, 2009. Joan is the first woman to serve as the Executive Minister in the 189-year history of the region.

Since being an Executive Minister is all about leadership, it is not a

stretch to assume I was called to American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis because others saw me as a highly capable leader. As I approach my work I could choose to lead from a task list that I efficiently accomplish and move on to the next challenge, after all I am paid to make ministry happen. Yet I have intuitively discovered that in the long run, shared leadership works best for me.

At first this seemed to be a matter of economic necessity. There are only so many hours in a day and with the smallest membership region in the ABC, there is no other professional staff with whom to carry the load. I quickly realized that shared leadership creates multiple benefits for our churches, our region leaders, and for me. Here is what I have learned.

We give region leaders skills they can use in their own churches. Earlier this year I needed a fourth team member for a retreat we hold with churches in pastoral transition. One of our newer, younger,

Since childhood, I have had friends from other faith traditions. In meeting and being impacted by persons of other faith traditions, I have interestingly gained clarity about why I believe what I believe. My Christian faith is inviolable, yet I connect well to those with different beliefs but similar values to mine. I am a “dyed in the wool Baptist,” and I enjoy celebrating our Baptist heritage. Our love of story, both scriptural and personal stories, as narratives of our faith, continues to draw me daily. Prayers, songs, and warm koinonia bring intellect and emotion together to fuel my faith and keeps me true.

In advocating for gender, racial, and economic justice, we have to take risks. A greater risk is not advocating for justice at all. “When one doesn’t risk, her or his salt loses its savor

and is good for being trampled.” Yet, we don’t travel to risky spheres alone; we go dependent on God’s leading and listen for that still small voice. Then, as we move forward, we are able to serve with courage, power, and good sense.

We are able to model spiritual leadership practices. Most of our ministries are still organized for the efficiency necessary to the growing church of the 1950s. We know how to get business done. We do not always know how to make it spiritually driven work. In our Board meetings and as we work with local congregations, we use practices such as scripture reflection, smaller group discerning, prayer woven in and out of the agenda, and close by asking how we saw God at work among us. We see these practices increasingly being used in ABC-GI churches.

We build relationships that strengthen all our ministries. With 36 churches no more than an hour from each other, I came to Indianapolis assuming that people and especially pastors knew each other. This was not the case! By drawing on shared leadership from a variety of churches, especially across ethnic and language lines, we are learning about one another and from each other.

Shared leadership initially takes more time, and I do have to let go of my own expectations of how things should get done, and trust other people to make it happen. But the benefits are clearly there for me, and besides, it is a lot more fun!

and is good for being trampled.” Yet, we don’t travel to risky spheres alone; we go dependent on God’s leading and listen for that still small voice. Then, as we move forward, we are able to serve with courage, power, and good sense.

Even after 30 years of ordained ministry, I maintain a hopeful, dynamic and unfolding vision for the future of the church. I believe the church will thrive, but not necessarily in the forms that we have known it best. Technology and mobility have changed the world significantly over the last few decades. Despite rapid changes, people continue to yearn for meaning and connection. We need to find and will find new ways, maybe better ways to do it. There is a lot to do, and we need the strength to do it well.

*We know
how to get
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We do not always
know how
to make it
spiritually driven
work.*

*They did not hold
onto what
they had received
but poured it
gladly into my life.*



Rev. Soozi
Whitten Ford

Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford, Executive Minister for the American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky. The region has had other female professional staff, but Soozi is their first Executive Minister.

One Labor Day Sunday several years ago, I worshiped with a congregation who, after fifty years of ministry, was celebrating their final worship experience together. This church was planted as a mission of another American Baptist church that recognized the opportunity for mission and service in a growing area of their community in the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, mission and service were distinctive characteristics of this church as they reached out to nearby university students and welcomed them, especially those who came to study from other nations. They were one of the most knowledgeable churches when it came to understanding, being connected to, and participating in the wider mission and ministry of American Baptists in the region, the nation and the world.

We celebrated communion even as those eager believers had done on their first Sunday together fifty years ago. As the pastor led us in preparation, he read the familiar words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 11, "...for I passed on to you what I received from the Lord Jesus..." We were reminded that faithful disciples don't hold onto what they have received, including the gospel. Instead, they recognize that what they have received is a gift from God and then look for ways to

share with others. In a beautifully symbolic moment, the presiding pastor then led in the distribution of the communion elements served by the church's first full-time pastor (visiting from out of state) and the pastor of a new congregation who would be receiving the gift of the church facilities.

"...Faithful disciples don't hold onto what they have received, including the gospel..." I have carried those with me and I am grateful, beyond measure, for the faithful disciples in my life who have shared with me their wisdom and learnings, as well as the pitfalls they have encountered.

I have always described my call to ministry as a "dawning realization" – God hinted at, and gently revealed the next step in my ministry journey just before it was to happen. I'm pretty sure it's because God knew me well enough to understand that, with any other process, I would have fled! At each of the junctures, God used the faithful disciples around me to hint at, to reveal, to challenge, to encourage, and to support. They did not hold onto what they had received but poured it gladly into my life.

Some of these faithful disciples have already passed from this life, while others are nearing that point. Some I remember fondly and enjoy visiting with them when we have the opportunity to be together. Still others I speak with on a weekly or regular basis. I continue to learn from their life's examples and their insights. And the process continues as God has infused my life with wise people even younger than I from whom I am learning much. God continues to use all of these saints to challenge, to nurture, and to teach me.

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA



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VISION: ABWIM seeks the full participation and full partnership of men and women in ministry in which both women and men are able to fully utilize their God-given gifts and fully live out their God-given call.

MISSION: ACCESS!

Advocating for equal access in placement and opportunities for ministry,
Cultivating women's call to ministry
Celebrating the gifts women bring to ministry,
Educating congregations about the biblical basis for women in ministry,
Shining the
Spotlight on American Baptist Women in Ministry!

ABWIM ACCESS: Accessing our gifts and gaining access to the world for the good of all and the glory of God!

We serve as the hands and feet of Christ when we recognize and receive all the gifts God has given to all God's people, opening doors and allowing access to all.